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Discussion paper contributed by the small forest land owners major group**

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** Prepared by the Confederation of European Forest Owners.

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Family forest owners and community forest owners — social capacity and cultural identity as core elements for the implementation of sustainable forest management

Summary

Family forest owners and community forest owners are one of the most critical major groups for the implementation of sustainable forest management. Partnerships and genuine consultation with family forest owners on all levels from local to global will increasingly lead to constructive implementation of international commitments on the ground.

Family forest owners and community forest owners form a core part of social and cultural networks in rural and semi-urban areas. The implementation of sustainable forest management is closely linked to their traditions and cultural identity that as such is highly diverse across the regions of the world.

There is not as yet enough understanding of the capacity of family forest owners and community forest owners to address sustainable forest management based on their day-to-day experience with nature. Neither is there a clear comprehension of the significance of the fact that forests and sustainable forest management form a core part of the welfare of family forest owners, community forest owners and their cultural identity.

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–3	3
II.	Background	4–18	3
	A. The global commitment	4–8	3
	B. Family forest owners and community forest owners — social capacity and cultural identity as core elements for the implementation of sustainable forest management	9–16	4
	C. The importance of secure property and land tenure rights	17–18	5
III.	Implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action	19–45	6
	A. Social and cultural aspects of forests	19–34	6
	B. Traditional forest-related knowledge	35–38	8
	C. Scientific forest-related knowledge	39–41	8
	D. Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management	42–45	9
IV	Conclusion	46–49	9
V.	Proposed actions for policy and decision makers	50	10

I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council stressed in its report on the first session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (E/2001/42/Rev.1-E/CN.18/2001/3/Rev.1) the importance of the involvement of major groups associated with forest management at the national, regional and global levels in the work of the Forum.

2. The many millions[1] of family forest owners are generally at the receiving end of policies developed in global and national policy forums. However, they are often the ones responsible for policy implementation on the ground and the translation of global and national agreements into practical action. They must face daily the complex challenges of balancing the often conflicting components of sustainable forest management.

3. The present discussion paper aims to build the bridge from practice to policy and from policy to practice, and to highlight the need for partnerships on the ground with relevance to the substantive elements of the fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

II. Background

A. The global commitment

4. Forests are at the basis of life on Earth. They perform a variety of functions and provide a diversity of goods and services to rural and urban societies.

5. The following principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development must be at the core of all activities related to fostering sustainable forest management in all the regions of the world:

Rio Declaration

- "Human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development" (Principle 1)
- "... and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices." (Principle 22)

Johannesburg Declaration

- "We [the ministers] commit ourselves to build a humane, equitable and caring global society cognizant of the need for human dignity for all."
- "... sustainable development requires long-term perspective and broad-based participation in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation at all levels. As social partners we [the ministers] will continue to work for stable partnerships with all major groups respecting the independent, important roles of each of these."

Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

- "... respect for cultural diversity [is] essential for achieving sustainable development and ensuring that sustainable development benefits all."

6. The Johannesburg Plan emphasized a partnership approach to policies that genuinely address the problems and concerns of those who depend for their livelihood on the goods and services of natural resources, and in particular, forests. On that basis, all interested and involved parties face the challenge of developing sound and long-term strategies for a dynamic evolution of sustainable forest management.

7. Currently, 149 countries, representing 85 per cent of the world's forests are engaged in regional forest policy processes. Their common goals are anchored in the forest principles agreed upon in Rio.

8. The forest policy processes,[2] which have taken up the political mandate from Rio, reinforced by the commitments from Johannesburg, give priority to democratic solutions that originate within the regions, involving in the first instance those who depend for their livelihood on forest goods and services.

B. Family forest owners and community forest owners — social capacity and cultural identity as core elements for the implementation of sustainable forest management

9. There are a great many variations of ownership structures across the forest regions of the world.

10. In Europe and the United States of America more than 60 per cent of forests are owned and managed by individual families. Australia, Canada and Costa Rica also have substantial forest areas in the hands of individual families. Australia is currently working towards using trees as environmental solutions and in this context, is integrating them into farm landscapes as well as in traditional "forest" blocks. There is also a substantial privately owned native timber resource which is being actively managed and sustainably harvested to achieve both commercial and environmental outcomes.

11. Local communities now legally own as private property or officially administer at least 22 per cent of all tropical forests, and this percentage is expected to increase. The area of tropical forests actively managed by local communities is approximately twice that of public-protected tropical forests globally.[3]

12. Family forest owners have a genuine interest in a balanced approach to sustainable forest management knowing that the generations to follow will also depend on goods and services from their forests. The responsibility of family forest owners to maintain the forest on a long-term basis is firmly rooted. They associate a set of values with their forests that they do not want to put at risk. The bond between rural populations and forests and forest management in its many forms is something very special. The adoption of sylvan landscapes by communities can create concerns at the harvest as the age class of the resource is substantially changed. Communities attribute their own personal values to these landscapes and it is important that they be educated in the life cycles of the forest resource.

13. Generation-bridging experience in management of natural resources has led family forest owners to the establishment of a treasure of practical knowledge and know-how that has not received adequate recognition from policy and decision makers. Through their day-to-day work with the forests, family forest owners are in a unique position to continuously learn about and understand the complex dynamics of forest management. In a partnership approach they stand to gain access to regional, national and international networks and new technologies, as well as scientific, financial and political support for their joint or individual projects.

14. Family forest owners and community forest owners have been the first to realize that time has a different value and dimension when comparing the planning of horizons for urban and rural forest-dependent communities.

15. Generally, this is not an easy message to convey in our modern society of instant communications and split-second decisions. The average political mandate of three to five years is hardly more than a snapshot in the life of a forest or the societal relationships associated with family forest ownership that are developed over several generations.

16. Thus, policy and decision makers are challenged to look far beyond normal planning periods in developing policies and strategies for sustainable forest management. By contributing a holistic and inter-generational approach and perspective to sustainable forest management, family forest owners can make a significant contribution to the development of the long-term perspective needed for sustainable forest management.

C. The importance of secure property and land tenure rights

17. Paragraph 40 of the note by the Secretariat (E/CN.18/AC.2/2003/2), providing background information to assist the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Finance and Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technologies, states that "Property rights are often the first step towards sustainable resource use." The basis for sustainable forest management is secure property and land tenure rights. Without such rights, neither a sense of responsibility nor an interest in managing forest in a way that they meet present and future needs can be developed.

18. Ownership — family forest ownership, community forest ownership — creates values. Giving the right of ownership to a large number of people leads to the creation of a variety of values. The owner's right to use and manage the multiple goods and benefits of forests contributes to a strong sense of responsibility for the conservation of this natural heritage.[4]

III. Implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action

A. Social and cultural aspects of forests

19. The history and development of mankind has from early times been influenced by nature and in particular forests. In many regions of the world the cultural identity of mankind is strongly linked with forests.

20. The social impact of family forestry is diverse and multifaceted. For each individual member of the family, the family owned forest may be a place to live, a place for recreation, an independent source of firewood and food, an opportunity for sharing knowledge and commitment, an influence on plans for future residence and employment, a source of financial security.

21. Family forest and community ownership and stewardship is shared among a large group of small forest owners distributing the benefits drawn from the forest widely in society. The wide distribution of responsibilities and benefits adds to the stable development of societies.

22. The financial security and income provided by forests have enabled the social development of the rural areas and the basis for investment in e.g., education, development of infrastructure or advanced production methods. Multiple products and benefits from forests together with family and community ownership have provided a diversified source of employment and income in rural areas where other options are scarce. This has made it easier for rural societies to adapt to socio-economic changes and maintain social and cultural viability, thus easing the population pressures on urban areas.

23. Demographic changes, in particular galloping urbanization, are weakening the bond between humans and forests. Consequently, the perception and understanding of urban societies for the concerns and priorities of rural societies, including family forest owners, are often virtual and simplistic.

24. Owing to the lack of reliable socio-economic data, it is not commonly known to what extent family forest owners depend for livelihood on the sustainable management of their forests. Management activities that are a natural part of the sustainability concept are, from an urban perspective, often put in the light of being antiquated and destructive, whereas in rural reality they form a core part of the welfare of family forest owners and community forest owners and their cultural identity.

25. Hunting and wildlife management is a good example of a social and cultural activity, strongly linked to forests, rural areas and its inhabitants. Over the last decades we have experienced a decrease in the understanding of hunting traditions, especially among the increasingly urbanized society. For example, the 8 million hunters in Europe are actually maintaining a very old tradition. The reality is that family forest owners often hunt together on a village level, in hunting clubs and associations with many differing activities, also off season. While safeguarding a hunting language and terminology, hunting adds to the value of life, as it increases interest, knowledge, inspiration and motivation for the sustainable management of

forests. Hunting is an essential part of game and biotope management as well as of the conservation of threatened fauna and flora.

26. It should be self-evident that those who own and manage the forests are also directly benefiting from its utilization. However, society's perception often makes no distinction between publicly and privately owned forests and thus the supply of non-marketable goods and services is considered free and thus taken for granted. There appears to be a trend worldwide to increasingly place pressure on family forest owners to provide even more societal services with a direct influence on the viability of the individual forest holding and little or no compensation.

Promoting public participation

27. Public participation, if correctly applied and implemented is certainly an asset in achieving sustainable forest management. However, if it is carried out without clear objectives, limits and responsibilities, it can easily lead to anarchistic situations in which everybody participates in everything and nobody wants to finally carry the responsibility for decisions. In this case, family forest owners are in the position of bearing the responsibility for the implementation of a decision that others have taken for them. The family forest is where the "rubber hits the road"! The consequence in this instance is the impact on the viability and sustainability of family forest ownership.

28. Public participation has to follow clear and agreed ground rules that do not infringe on the property rights of family forest owners.

29. Many policy decisions that adversely impact family forest owners are the result of urban pressure, often taken without consultation of those most concerned, and supported by the electoral weight of urban populations. It is imperative that family forest owners, together with others who make their livelihood in rural areas, understand the nature of the concerns of urban dwellers, how "city-folk" view non-urban areas, and how centrally based decision makers are often influenced by small, but powerful urban-based pressure groups for their own political ends.

30. The primary issue is to ameliorate, through education, the negative effects of urban-based land use decisions that impact both rural and urban/rural interface areas, decisions that are taken by people isolated, to a large extent, from the impact of such decisions, and whose prime motivation is to cater to the urban electorate.

31. The concept of public participation in forestry can be defined as various forms of direct public involvement where people, individually or through organized groups, can exchange information, express opinions and articulate interest, and have the potential to influence decisions or the outcome of specific forestry issues. Public participation in forestry is a process which is inclusive, with respect to the interests; voluntary, with respect to participation; may be a complement to legal requirements; is fair and transparent to all participants; is based on participants acting in good faith; and does not guarantee – or predetermine – what the outcome will be.[5]

32. Public participation needs to respect that in decision-making local and regional levels should be favoured. Local decision-making enables more active and diversified participation of those most involved and concerned. Their experience and knowledge benefits the decision-making process and leads to true commitment of local actors.

33. Public participation processes may in principle be applied to all types of forest ownership. While public participation cannot go ahead without their acceptance, private forest owners, for example, may choose to take part in or initiate a participatory process as defined in the foregoing like any other owner or actor in the forestry sector. It is however, recognized that private ownership represents a different context for participation compared to public forests, with a different set of constraints and opportunities. These need to be taken into account in the design and implementation of a process.[5]

34. One of the best ways to ensure that private forest owners can articulate their positions and contribute to the broader forestry dialogue within society is through strong private forest owners' associations, with broad private forest representation. This can be promoted by enhancing their capacity to organize public participation processes themselves, as well as through other options such as partnerships, selective working groups, and others. To this end, institutional and technical support may be necessary, particularly in countries in transition where private forest ownership is new and growing.[5]

B. Traditional forest-related knowledge

35. Family forest owners are the guardians of traditional forest-related knowledge that has not yet found its way into forestry literature and research. This valuable pool of traditional forest-related knowledge has grown and has been safeguarded from generation to generation over centuries. It survived because it still forms the basis for today's concept of sustainable forest management.

36. There are practical ways to incorporate traditional forest-related knowledge into modern management concepts and thus ensure its continuity.

37. Experience in Europe shows that the degree of organization of forest owners has a positive influence on their capacity-building and training opportunities. On the local level, forest owners' associations offer a wide range of training and know-how to the individual forest owner that allow him/her to take sound and responsible decisions in day-to-day management. In Australia there are also examples in this integration. More fundamentally is the identified need to educate the "non-forestry" local community in the role of forestry as contributor to the landscape and to the economic stability of the area.

38. It should be noted that traditional forest-related knowledge can often be very specific to a certain place or local condition. This traditional forest-related knowledge not only benefits the sustainable forest management practices but also relates to significant cultural and/or historical values that have to be safeguarded in forest management, planning and conservation.

C. Scientific forest-related knowledge

39. There is an increasing awareness that the policy, science, practice interface has to be strengthened to develop long-term sustainable strategies in the forestry sector. To that end, it is crucial that family forest owners contribute with their knowledge and know-how in the field to single-issue as well as multidisciplinary research projects.

40. There is a need in socio-economic policy-related science to ensure that the situation of family forest owners forms part of the research to establish a direct link and gain practical feedback to the subsequent implementation on the ground.

41. There are already a number of good examples aiming at the establishment of centres of competence that range from scientific expertise to end-user expertise. It is only in close cooperation between the science, practice and policy that well-informed and sound decisions can be taken.

D. Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management

42. The nine regional forest policy processes[2] that grew out of the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 are engaged in the development of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management that reflect the variety of cultural, social, economic and ecological conditions for the implementation of sustainable forest management in each region.

43. Family forest owners in Europe are actively taking part in the discussion of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. The process of the Ministerial Conference has led to agreement on a number of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of forests in the Pan-European region.

44. Family forest owners in Europe have been at the cradle of the creation of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (see www.pefc.org). Since 1999 they have actively implemented the commitments made at the Ministerial Conference through the Programme certification that is based on the Ministerial Conference criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

45. Within the Ministerial Conference process, Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society representatives have continued to follow a learning process in the understanding of each other's needs, concerns and challenges in dealing with sustainable forest management.

IV. Conclusion

46. Family forestry is the delivery point of many societal benefits of sustainable forest management and is based on a function of stable family forest ownership and a knowledge base built up over many generations.

47. Policy and decision makers are encouraged to look to family forest owners as partners in the implementation of consistent strategies for sustainable forest management.

48. There is increasing awareness that sustainable forest management is not viable without being embedded in a larger sustainable development strategy that addresses positive and negative impacts on forests and forestry.

49. Family forest owners are committed to identifying major challenges with a view to the implementation of social and cultural aspects of sustainable forest management. They stand ready to make their knowledge and know-how in these areas available in efforts to address and solve these challenges.

V. Proposed actions for policy and decision makers

50. **Governments and regional and local authorities are requested to:**

(a) **Respect the right to sustainably use the forest resources and the traditional ways to benefit from the multiple products of forests;**

(b) **Consider that forestry is a legitimate commercial pursuit, and the human and financial capacity that family forest owners invest needs to be allowed to be accessed, or compensated in the event of exclusion from the resource;**

(c) **Increase the involvement of family forest organizations in policy development and policy delivery with respect to sustainable forest management;**

(d) **Improve the coordination of different policies and programmes to avoid having conflicting requirements set for those who need to put the outcomes into practice;**

(e) **Create a favourable environment and promote the establishment of forest owner organizations as a means of supporting the forest owners' involvement and input in sustainable forest management;**

(f) **Develop decision-making processes that involve all relevant stakeholders and give preference to local and regional decision-making;**

(g) **Clearly identify and broaden awareness within all sectors of society of sustainable forest management values due to a stable, family-owned forest;**

(h) **Invest in broad-based education initiatives to educate both urban and rural sectors about the societal benefits derived from family forests;**

(i) **Develop community education programmes that assist the community in understanding that trees are grown for a commercial return;**[6]

(j) **Quantify the values of non-market benefits enjoyed by society due to the continuing presence of family forests;**

(k) **Quantify the socio-economic value of management activities that form a core part of the welfare of family forest owners and community forest owners and their cultural identity, such as hunting, and non-timber forest products;**

(l) **Actively create a model to collect and incorporate traditional forest-related knowledge in decision-making and assess the feasibility of traditional forest-related knowledge management models.**

Notes

[1] A broad estimate indicates that there are about 100 million family forests worldwide with some 200-400 million people making all or part of their living from their properties.

[2] The Helsinki Process [now Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe], the Montreal Process, the Tarapoto Process, the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTO) Process, the Dry-Zone Africa Process, the Near East Process, the African Timber Organization Process, The Lepaterique Process, Dry Forests in Asia.

[3] At the ITTO Council meeting, Yokohama, Japan, November 2003, Yati Bun spoke on behalf of the Civil Society Advisory Group.

[4] The Center for International Forestry Research, "Forest and people: Research that makes a difference". In Africa and Asia villagers participating in the adaptive collaborative management have said that it has increased their sense of ownership over forest resources and has given them the confidence to participate in processes that will affect their lives and their environment for the better. Stripped down to its basics adaptive collaborative management is about establishing institutional arrangements and processes that encou: age local democracy and collaboration and provide the time and space for group reflection.

[5] See *Public participation in forestry in Europe and North America*, report by Joint FAO/ECE/ILO, Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training (ILO, Geneva, 2000).

[6] These returns are inter-generational and there is an ongoing risk that the adoption of a sylvan landscape by the community could cause disharmony at the realization of the asset. Encouragement of adoption of trees in the landscape must be coupled with a capacity for the community to understand the commercial imperatives of forestry.